

WELCOME

This information can help you get the most benefit from your treatments. I encourage you to read it before your first acupuncture treatment and to refer to it often to help you cultivate health.

Before your appointments

Be sure to eat something before you come since an empty stomach can provoke lightheadedness or fainting during acupuncture treatments. Coffee, alcohol or other drugs can affect the pulses, so it is best to avoid them on the day of your appointment. (In the event you forget, be sure to tell me what you had and when so I can adjust the pulse interpretation accordingly.) Chinese diagnosis also involves examination of the tongue, so please refrain from scraping the coating off the tongue on treatment days. Finally, since the body's natural odor can be diagnostic, applied fragrances are an impediment to receiving the correct diagnosis. Loose fitting clothing that can easily be pulled up to the knees and elbows and shirts that button down the front are ideal for treatment but not essential.

Between treatments

When you first begin acupuncture it is advisable to get treatments once a week for at least 4-6 weeks. This should be enough to tell if acupuncture is going to be effective for you. Weekly treatments early on build momentum so the effects can be sustained between appointments even after treatments are spread months apart.

Acupuncture treatment accounts for, at most, one hour out of the 168 hours per week. That leaves 167 hours during which you can either enhance the effectiveness of the needles or bury the benefits through abuse. Active participation on your part is extremely beneficial and can prevent you from growing out of balance and requiring intensive treatment in the future. So what can you do to get the most from treatments?

Because poor nutrition saps our energy, let's begin with diet. When our energy is low we are disinclined to go through the trouble to shop for, prepare and eat nutritious food. Denuded food is cheap, accessible, quick, and easy; and time is so scarce—it's no wonder we fall into this trap. The downward spiral keeps twisting if it isn't stopped. Initially, sheer will is the only thing that can break this cycle.

DIETARY GUIDELINES

Eat simply. Too many ingredients make hard work for the Spleen (the organ governing the digestive process in traditional Chinese Medicine). Simple foods eaten on a regular schedule ease digestion.

Drink between rather than with meals. While Chinese dietary wisdom encourages staying well hydrated, at mealtime, fluid intake should be limited to a cupful of water or tea to prevent dilution of digestive juices.

Avoid cold foods. Cold food and beverages extinguish digestive fire and slow down the digestive process.

Reduce sugar. Sugar and all highly sweet foods can easily overwhelm the Spleen. The over-consumption of sugar results in unstable energy levels, weight gain and intestinal fermentation.

Separate sweet foods and fruit from the main meal. This helps reduce Fermentation and supports the Spleen's action of sifting and sorting.

Naturally fermented foods in the diet such as sauerkraut, dill pickles, miso and active-culture yoghurt help to re-establish healthy intestinal flora and benefit digestion.

Relax and sit comfortably when eating. A slumped posture compresses the digestive organs. Make space below the ribcage by taking a few calm, deep breaths before eating.

Chew well. Digestion starts in the mouth. Well-chewed food presents less work for the stomach and intestines.

Eat lightly. Overeating is a major cause of Stagnation and Dampness. If we stop eating *before* we are full we will suffer fewer complications from these conditions and will have much more energy.

Enjoy your food. Eating with deep gratitude and enjoyment can open up your entire being to receive nourishment.

Trust your body. The body knows what nourishes it. Practice listening deeply to its needs—beyond the siren song of advertising, neurotic cravings and negative self-talk—and supply what is needed. When we are deeply connected to and respectful of our bodies we can safely pitch out all our health and diet books.

EXERCISE GUIDELINES

We are built for movement. The Chinese understood that lack of physical exercise leads to stagnation of Qi and Blood. (Western medical researchers, too, understand that a sedentary lifestyle rivals smoking as a risk factor for developing chronic, debilitating illness and premature death.)

Exercise daily. This doesn't need to be extreme. In fact, it is better if it isn't. Brisk walks are fine. Regularity is essential. This should be as much a part of your day as brushing your teeth or, perhaps, checking e-mail.

Find something you love to do and do it. Hiking, yoga, riding a bike, dancing, swimming, taiji, gardening—whatever—just get out and play. (If exercise is something to be endured like swallowing a bitter pill, you will surely find a way to get out of doing it.)

Listen to your body. There can definitely be too much of a good thing. Energy should increase and moods improve with regular exercise. If you become fatigued during or after exercise, you are probably over-training. Ease off on the intensity.

Listen to your body—part two. If it hurts, stop. A little soreness from building up new muscle is fine, but if it feels like an injury, be sure to rest the injured area long enough for it to mend completely. If your feet are inflamed, try swimming, or switch from tennis to roller skating while your elbow heals. Pain is your body's way of trying to get you to pay attention. Ignore it at your own peril!

MEDITATION/BREATHING GUIDELINES

A quiet mind is more productive than a racing mind. This is totally counterintuitive, but you'll just have to take my word for it until you have discovered it for yourself.

Sleep is not the same as meditation. Regular and adequate sleep is necessary to good health. However, meditation requires us to be conscious.

Breathing 101. Lie down with your hands on your belly just below the navel with the fingertips of your middle fingers just barely touching each other. Let all the muscles in your face, neck, back, arms, buttocks, and legs grow heavy and loose. Allow your belly to expand and the breath rush in to fill the space like a giant bellows. As your abdomen expands, your fingertips will separate, and as you relax and exhale they will touch again.

Now it's time to sit up. Because it is so easy to fall asleep practicing breathing lying down in this way, it may be helpful to sit up once you have mastered abdominal breathing while reclining. With your feet on the floor and your "sits bones" supporting you on the seat, allow a gentle smile to form on your face as you consciously inhale peace and joy with each breath. You may need to remind your muscles to unclench several times, and as your mind wanders and races about, bring it back to the breath and the sensations in your body as you breathe. No doubt you will need to reel your mind in over and over. Just as you didn't learn to ride a bike without falling down many times, no doubt you will lose focus repeatedly. Forgive your monkey-mind and stay in practice; you *will* improve. Again, regularity of practice is important.

Take an inventory. One day after meditating, get up and take an inventory of your life. Without blaming yourself or anyone else, ask yourself what is rich and fulfilling in your life. What is absent? What insight to you have about what is out of balance and what are you willing to change to bring about greater harmony? Besides yourself, who would benefit if you were living life more fully? Honor yourself by taking the time to write down your answers to these and other questions as well as your overall goals and specific strategies for achieving them.

I look forward to working with you and offer my support as you grow and stretch in new ways. To that end, I hope these suggestions prove helpful.

Ann Furniss, L.Ac.